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SUBJECT: Albania Shuffles Ministers

¶1. (SBU) After several months of media speculation, Prime Minister Berisha on July 23 submitted the following proposed changes to his cabinet to President Topi for approval:

-- Education Minister Genc Pollo, head of the New Democracy Party, will become Deputy Prime Minister.

-- Deputy Speaker of Parliament Fatos Beja, Democratic Party, will become Minister of Education.

-- Anila Godo, daughter of Honorary Chairman of the Republican Party Sabri Godo, but with no current political position, will become Minister of Health.

COMMENT: These changes seem to be no more than Berisha's attempt to satisfy some of his coalition partners and to put himself and his party in the most advantageous position for the 2009 elections. We have no reason to believe that the changes to the cabinet will have any effect on Albania's continued, pro-US foreign policy. End Comment

¶2. (SBU) Pollo, an ally whose party has been losing influence, will be elevated in political stature as Deputy PM. Beja, who is chair of the Parliament's Laws Committee, allegedly supported Berisha's clash with Topi by denying all six of Topi's High Court justice nominees. Demo-Christian Party leader Health Minister Nard Ndoka, on the other hand, has been gaining power and opposing Berisha, leading the PM allegedly to orchestrate behind-the-scenes moves to undermine his party leadership. Although the Republican Party, headed by former Minister of Defense Fatmir Mediu, has been a loyal Berisha supporter, Mediu's resignation in the wake of the Gerdec tragedy and the looming investigation into his involvement has weakened the party and caused it considerable embarrassment. Although Godo has no previous political experience, she has no political baggage or enemies, and is linked to the PR through her father.

¶3. (SBU) Brief bios of the nominees:

Fatos Beja - Beja was born in 1948 and earned a Doctorate in Philosophy at Tirana University in 1970. Prior to entering politics, he worked in academia at the Institute of Literature, Language and Science Academy. He was President Berisha's Diplomatic Advisor before being elected a Member of Parliament (MP) in 1996. He is a member of the Democratic Party (DP) chairmanship and has been DP Secretary for Human Rights. This is his third term as an MP. He is one of two Deputy Speakers of Parliament.

Anila Godo - Daughter of PR Honorary Chairman Sabri Godo; pediatrician by profession.

Genc Pollo - Genc Pollo was born in 1963 in Tirana. He graduated with a degree in History from the University of Tirana in 1986. From 1986 -1988, he was a researcher with the Academy of Science. He completed advanced postgraduate studies at Vienna University (1998-1990).

Mr. Pollo began his political career in 1990 as one of the founders

of the Democratic Party (DP). In February 1996, he was appointed foreign relations secretary of the DP and in April 1996 became the party's Secretary General. Previously, Pollo served as adviser to the Albanian President (1992-96).

In 1996, Pollo was elected Member of Parliament where he served as deputy chairman of Integration Commission and later as chairman of Foreign Affairs Commission. He was re-elected in 1997, when he was also elected Deputy Chairman of the Democratic Party. He served at the same time as Chairman of the DP Parliamentary Group.

In 1999, Pollo challenged Sali Berisha at the DP Congress for the position of DP chair. Upon losing, he left the DP and created the New Democrat Party, which he currently chairs. (The Party is a small member of the governing coalition.)

Genc Pollo was one of the founders of the Albanian Atlantic Association and from 1993-2004 he served as its vice President. He speaks English, German, French and Italian.

WITHERS